

An Open Letter to The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Please say no to Drax's climate-wrecking gas power plans

The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned about the climate and environmental impacts of Drax Repower's proposal to replace its two remaining coal-fired units with much larger ones to burn gas.

Drax is already the U.K.'s single largest emitter of carbon dioxide.¹ Its power station causes serious harm to the climate and the environment by burning more coal than any other UK plant and more wood than any other plant in the world. Much of the wood comes from the clearcutting of carbon rich forests in the southern US which lie at the heart of a global biodiversity hotspot.²

With the UK government demanding a coal phase-out by 2025, Drax now wants to build the UK's largest ever gas power units and is asking for substantial new subsidies, in addition to the £2 million a day it is already receiving for burning wood.³ Drax itself admits in its Preliminary Environmental Information Report that its gas plans will: "represent a significant net increase in greenhouse gas emissions and have therefore negative climate impacts."

In order to meet the goal of the Paris Climate Agreement, it is vital for the UK to phase out carbon emissions from fossil fuels and high-carbon biomass, not increase them. Permitting power stations such as Drax to burn large quantities of natural gas will push us beyond the 1.5 degree limit and prevent the UK from meeting its international climate change commitments. As the recent Oil Change International report states: "*Opening new fossil gas fields is inconsistent with the Paris climate goals.*"⁴

Drax's plan to replace coal with another fossil fuel will hamper rather than help the U.K.'s transition to low carbon energy, particularly since Drax has said that repurposing two coal units to burn gas will "*extend their operation into the 2030s.*" As the ecosystem scientist, Professor Robert W Howarth, from Cornell University, states: "There is no bridge fuel and switching from coal to shale gas is accelerating rather than slowing global warming."⁵

A further concern is that Drax's proposal comes at a time when greater reliance on gas would require either increased Russian imports or dependence on unconventional gas, especially fracking and horizontal drilling. In spite of huge local and national opposition to fracking, the recent government proposal to transfer decisions on fracking from a local to a national level is increasing fears about a threat to local democracy from unconventional gas exploration.⁶ According to Drill or Drop, there are already 3 active shale gas sites in the UK, with the UK's first commercial scale fracking expected to start at Cuadrilla's Preston New Road site in Lancashire imminently.⁷ A Freedom of Information request has revealed that the government expects there to be approximately 17 sites by 2020 and around 30 to 35 sites by 2022.⁸

All gas production and transport is associated with leakage of the potent greenhouse gas methane, but unconventional gas comes with far greater methane emissions.⁹ Methane leakage in the production of gas for Drax would therefore greatly increase carbon emissions over and above the smokestack emissions.

Finally, we are concerned that Drax has stated that the project will need substantial funding from tax payers, in the form of Capacity Market Payment subsidies over a 15 year period.¹⁰

The future of Drax power station may hinge on it receiving planning consent and these subsidies for new gas. Without them, the power station may no longer be profitable and have to close. This would reduce the UK's carbon emissions, save biodiverse forests and protect communities from air pollution. It would also help the UK to meet its climate goals by creating a strong incentive to expand low-carbon renewable energy and investment in energy efficiency and conservation.

Therefore, we urge you to:

- a) **Refuse planning permission for the Drax Repower proposal because it is not a sustainable development and cannot be part of a transition to a low carbon economy;**
- b) **Ensure that Drax cannot bid for Capacity Market payment subsidies for the proposed gas power units;**
- c) **Focus support on genuinely renewable wind, wave and solar energy as well as on energy efficiency and conservation which can help us to meet our climate targets.**

¹ Please note that Drax is the largest single source of carbon emissions and the figure does not include airports.

² <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/axedrax-campaign/>

³ <http://repower.drax.com/#why-repower>

⁴ http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2018/06/debunked_q20_eng_07_web.pdf

⁵ https://www.eeb.cornell.edu/howarth/publications/f_EECT-61539-perspectives-on-air-emissions-of-methane-and-climatic-warmin_100815_27470.pdf

⁶ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-05-17/HCWS690>

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hydraulic-fracturing-consent-hfc-application-by-cuadrilla-bowland-ltd-decision-notice?utm_source=c263a79a-c28e-4bde-8fd7-25e79fb8b633&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

⁸ <https://drillordrop.com/2018/02/11/unpublished-government-report-scales-back-predictions-on-uk-fracking/>

⁹ http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2018/06/debunked_q20_eng_07_web.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Drax-Group-plc-2017-annual-report.pdf>

List of Signatories

UK

- A Greener Hawick
- Biofuelwatch
- BP or not BP?
- Breaking The Frame
- Brighton Action Against Fracking
- Brighton Climate Action Network
- Campaign Against Climate Change
- Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon
- Climate Revolution
- Coal Action Network
- Colombia Solidarity Campaign
- Community Energy England
- Corner House
- Cumbria Action for Sustainability
- Cyclops Pedal Power Leeds CIC
- Divest Hackney
- Divest Lambeth
- Divest Parliament
- Divest Strathclyde
- Econexus UK
- Energy Poverty Research Initiative
- Fossil Free Glasgow
- Frack Aware Barnsley
- Frack Free Exmoor, Quantocks and Sedgemoor
- Frack Free Food Alliance
- Frack Free Harrogate District
- Frack Free Leeds
- Frack Free Ryedale
- Frack Free Scarborough
- Frack Free Surrey
- Frack Free Sussex
- Frack Free United
- Frack Free Wakefield and District
- Frack Off London
- Frackwatch Glasgow
- Friends of the Earth Abergavenny and Crickhowell
- Friends of the Earth Croydon
- Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Friends of the Earth Glasgow
- Friends of the Earth Glastonbury

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- Friends of the Earth Harrogate
 - Friends of the Earth Newbury
 - Friends of the Earth Torbay
 - Fuel Poverty Action
 - Global Justice Now Glasgow
 - Green Christian
 - Green House Think Tank
 - Hereford Green Party
 - Holmfirth Transition Town
 - Initiative for Carbon Accounting (ICARB)
 - Kirklees Campaign against Climate Change
 - Landworkers Alliance
 - London Mining Network
 - Low Impact
 - New Economy Law
 - New Putney Debates
 - Occupy Environment Working Group (EEE)
 - Operation Noah
 - People and Planet
 - Real Democracy Movement
 - Reclaim The Power
 - Residents Action on Fylde Fracking
 - Roundhay Environmental Action Project
 - Sheffield Against Fracking
 - Sheffield Climate Alliance
 - South Lakes Action on Climate Change
 - Sustainable Pill and District
 - Test Valley Friends of the Earth
 - The C.H.E.E.S.E Project (The Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts Project)
 - Transition Falmouth
 - Transition Town Brixton
 - Treesponsibility: Climate Action in Calderdale
 - UK Tar Sands Network
 - UK Without Incineration Network
 - UK Youth Climate Coalition
 - Weald Action Group
 - Women's Environmental Network
 - York Green Party

Europe and International

- Australian Forests and Climate Alliance (Australia)
- Dogwood Alliance (USA)
- Estonian Forest Aid

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- Food and Water Europe
 - Friends of the Earth US (USA)
 - Gastivists
 - Global Forest Coalition
 - Noah – Friends of the Earth Denmark
 - Healthy Forest Coalition (Canada)
 - Partnership for Policy Integrity (USA)
 - Rettet den Regenwald (Germany)
 - Salva la Selva (Spain)
 - Skydda Skogen (Protect the Forest) (Sweden)
 - Upper Valley Affinity Group (USA)